

communications across the sheriff's office while saving taxpayer money. He also increased the number of full-time deputies on patrol to 25 and secured a nearly \$7 million budget. In addition, he created the Sheriff Santa Program to help families in need during the holidays.

I have worked with my friend Sheriff Tackitt for several years and witnessed first-hand the important work he has done for his community. We must never forget his leadership during the tragedy at Sutherland Springs Church in 2017 and how much he cared for his community as a third-generation native of Wilson County. The dedication that he showed to others should be a constant reminder of how we should be in our daily lives.

For his leadership and service, Sheriff Tackitt has received several awards. In 2018, his office was presented with the EMS Telecommunicator Award by the Texas Department of State Health Services for outstanding achievement. In addition, the Sheriffs' Association of Texas recognized Sheriff Tackitt and his staff in 2019 for the outstanding support they provided for the 141st Annual Training Conference and Expo.

In addition to his hard work as sheriff, he is active in his community as a member of the Sheriff's Association of Texas, the Floresville Lions Club, and the Texas Jail Association. Along with his involvement in the community, he also served as a member of the Texas Air National Guard and is a devoted family man.

As we move forward, let us take the time to appreciate the service of heroes like Sheriff Tackitt and all the individuals who risk their lives each day to keep us safe. However, in the words of President John F. Kennedy, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

Madam Speaker, it is my honor to recognize the career and service of Sheriff Tackitt.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MICHAEL T. McCAUL

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Mr. McCAUL. Madam Speaker, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted Yea on Roll Call No. 239.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Mr. DeFAZIO. Madam Speaker, on December 8, 2020, I was unavoidably detained due to traffic congestion and missed the following vote: on the Motion to Suspend the Rules and Pass, as Amended, H.R. 8354, the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative Act of 2020. Had I been present, I would have voted Yea.

CONFERENCE REPORT TO ACCOMPANY H.R. 6395 WILLIAM M. (MAC) THORNBERRY NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Mr. DeFAZIO. Madam Speaker, yesterday I voted in support of the Conference Report to accompany H.R. 6395, the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021. Make no mistake: I have opposed NDAA legislation in previous years, and I still have concerns about a number of provisions included in this year's legislation, but this year's conference legislation also contains numerous policy priorities that I strongly support.

As with the initial House-passed NDAA, this legislation grants our men and women in uniform a well-deserved pay raise of 3 percent. This is the very least we can do for those who continue to make extraordinary sacrifices for our country.

As Chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I fought to successfully include vital provisions important to Oregon coastal communities. This includes the Elijah E. Cummings Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2020, legislation to authorize funds for, reinforce, and support the United States Coast Guard. I am also pleased that the conferees retained important provisions to reauthorize U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) programs, and for the first time provided MARAD with authority to provide financial assistance to the U.S. Maritime Transportation System in the event of a national emergency or disaster such as the current COVID-19 public health emergency.

Given the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's jurisdiction over the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), I am proud that this legislation makes a long-overdue correction to ensure that the more than 45,000 FAA employees, as well as VA and other federal civilian employees who were inexcusably left out of last year's NDAA, receive twelve weeks of paid parental leave.

I am also proud that the Conference Report includes long-overdue benefits for veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Specifically, the legislation adds Parkinsonism, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism to the list of diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents. This will ensure that tens of thousands of veterans with these diseases get the benefits they deserve.

While Congress must do much more to achieve racial justice in this country, I strongly support conferees' retention of language requiring the Department of Defense (DOD) to remove all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and more that honor Confederate individuals on DOD property. This demonstrates a strong bipartisan rebuke of President Trump's inexplicable threat to veto the NDAA if this long-overdue provision is included. I also support the bill's addition of needed diversity requirements for DOD military and civilian personnel, as well as provisions to curtail transfer of various military-grade equipment to law enforcement agencies. In addition, I am a strong supporter of this bill's requirement that federal

law enforcement officers, active duty military, and National Guard members deployed in response to public protests visibly display their name and agency on their uniform. This requirement is especially crucial given Trump's appalling use of unidentifiable federal agents and unmarked vehicles to detain peaceful protesters in Portland, Oregon.

I am pleased the conference legislation refuses to authorize funding for President Trump's dangerous and unnecessary proposals to initiate new nuclear weapons testing. I also support the bill's inclusion of funding for the Maritime Security Program (MSP) to help mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on maritime carriers. Additionally, I support the Conference Report's provisions to strengthen the federal government's ability to combat money laundering and counter financing for terrorism.

The Conference Report also takes steps to counter China's increasingly malign influence. This includes mandating a whole-of-government strategy to deter China's industrial espionage and theft of intellectual property, as well as China's large-scale theft of personal information. It also establishes a plan to make the DOD less dependent on Chinese manufacturing, and it pushes back against China's appalling human rights abuses. While these are good first steps, I believe Congress can and should do more to combat China, including standing up against China's trade abuses.

The legislation also establishes guardrails that prohibit the Secretary of Defense from reducing the civilian workforce unless and until the DOD first assesses the impact of such reductions. This will help protect against President Trump's ridiculous attacks—and potential future attacks—on civilian federal employees.

This legislation includes hundreds-of-millions in funding for the construction of additional housing and barracks for training and enlisted personnel, as well as for oversight and improvement of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI) program. The NDAA Conference Report also continues Congress's work to address the military's culture of sexual misconduct by including provisions to enhance the prevention of and response to incidents of sexual trauma.

While I strongly support many provisions in this year's NDAA, I believe this legislation should have included additional provisions to rein in our bloated and wasteful defense spending, take back Congress's constitutional war powers authority, and more.

I believe this legislation could have made responsible cuts to our defense budget without jeopardizing the safety of our troops or undermining our national security. For years, Congress has continued to increase the Pentagon's budget despite overwhelming evidence of its waste and abuse of taxpayer money. That's why I supported an amendment to responsibly reduce the Pentagon budget while retaining exceptions to protect service members, civilian employees, and the vital Defense Health Program from this reduction. Frustratingly, this amendment failed to pass.

In particular, I have always opposed the DOD's Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account, a fiscally irresponsible fund that is not counted in the budget, recklessly adds to our mounting debt, and has no congressional oversight. OCO is a Pentagon slush fund that gives a blank check to fund endless wars that Congress hasn't authorized. I will continue fighting to finally eliminate this irresponsible fund.